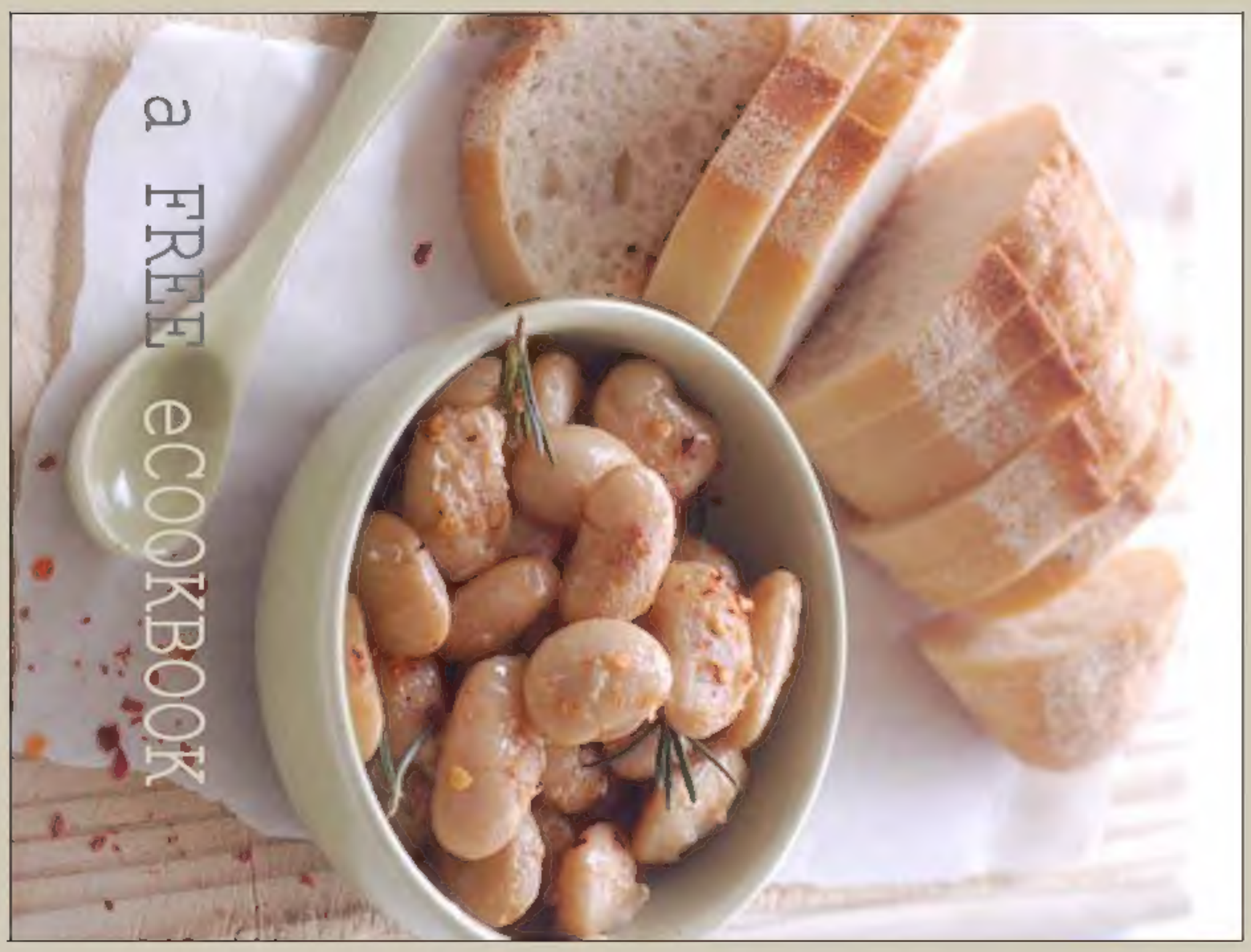
STONE SOUP

MINIMALIST HOME COOKING



for my mates
thanks for your support xx

stonesoup | minimalist home cooking
a FREE e-cookbook.
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This is a FREE e-book. Please spread the love and share it with anyone you think may benefit from a collection of fast, fresh, simple recipes. It can be downloaded from www.thestonesoup.com.

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the story of stonesoup

Hi there. My name is Jules Clancy. **I love food. I love wine**. And I'm the only person I know that is crazy enough to have degrees in both.

In 2005, I was working as a food scientist developing new products for a gobal cereal company when I discovered the world of food blogs. I'd always **longed to write recipes for a living**, however, it seemed like an impossible career to crack into. But anyone could start a blog... and so began *stonesoup*.

After a few months writing, I knew this was what I was meant to do. I invested in a digital camera and by trial and a lot of error began to take photos of my food. In January 2010, I took the next step on my blogging path and quit my day job to become **a full-time blogger**.

stonesoup is a blog that **helps people become better home cooks** by using a minimalist approach to cooking. It allows me to use my food science knowledge for good. I focus on reducing the number of ingredients, the amount of equipment, the number of steps involved, and the time we spend in the kitchen to a minimum so we can **focus what's important**. It's about simple, wholesome, delicious food that is easy to prepare and still fun and satisfying to eat.

Why the FREE e-cookbook? Over the past year I've been writing a series of recipes that have only **5 ingredients** and take **10 minutes** to prepare. They've been published in a number of locations. I thought it would be useful to have these recipes all together in the one handy ebook that you can keep on your laptop or computer at work as an **at-your-fingertips reference** for when you need inspiration for what to cook for dinner.

If you do find this recipe book useful, I'd really appreciate it if you **shared the love** and forwarded it to your family and friends. Or better yet - send them the link to *stonesoup* (www.thestonesoup.com) so they can download their own copy and discover the wonderful world of food blogging themselves.

Love
Jules x

what is minimalist home cooking?

I could make some dodgy jokes about minimalist home cooking being eating out all the time, or what happens when you're in a country stricken by famine – but I'll spare you.

In the stonesoup kitchen, the focus is on recipes that meet most or all of the following criteria:

minimal time
As much as I love spending a whole day in the kitchen, I'm always thinking about how I can do things more quickly and efficiently. This is where the **10 minutes** comes in.

minimal number of steps
This is related to time but I wanted to spell it out separately. At *stonesoup* I'm always looking to minimalise the number of steps needed in a recipe. I strive to keep the instructions concise but easy to follow.

minimal number of ingredients
A long ingredient list can be daunting. This inspired me to create this series of recipes using **5 ingredients or less**. There are no needless ingredients. Everything must perform a key function to get included.

minimal equipment
I've never been a fan of single-use kitchen equipment and I know that like me, most people are cooking in pretty basic kitchens. While some of the recipes in this book may be quicker and easier to prepare with a food processor, that's as fancy as it gets.

There's a section on how to setup a minimalist kitchen later in this book.

SPANISH
ONIONS
1.99

how minimalist home cooking can HELP YOU

Minimalist home cooking is all about stripping things back to the essentials. Here are 7 ways where my [5 ingredients / 10 mintues] recipes can HELP YOU.

less time in the kitchen
10 minutes cooking leaves **more time** for the activities and people you love.

less time shopping
With only **5 ingredients** in each recipe, you'll find your **shopping lists are shorter** and more managable. You won't need to spend as much time out hunting and gathering.

eating more fresh, healthy food
Everyone knows that home cooked food tends to be **better for you**. With the focus on fresh ingredients, my 5 ingredients recipes make it easy.

more pleasure & enjoyment
Cooking can be a great way to **relax and unwind**. Spending 10 minutes using one of my minimalist recipes will help you gain more pleasure and enjoyment from dinner time.

save money
If dinner only takes 10 minutes to prepare, you'll be more likely to **cook for yourself** than take the expensive dial-a-dinner option.

less stress
Long ingredient lists and complicated methods can lead to much stress and kitchen confusion. Minimalist home cooking keeps things as **simple and stress-free** as possible.

more kitchen confidence
If you're new to cooking, starting with minimalist recipes will help you get some great simple dishes under your belt and give you the confidence to tackle anything,

about 5 ingredients 10 minutes

[5 ingredients | 10 minutes] is a series of recipes aimed at keeping things as simple as possible. The original idea of 5 ingredients. 5 minutes. came from the lovely Sheri over at Zen Family Habits. *But over time we expanded to 10 minutes to give a little more flexiblity.*

The recipes in this FREE e-cookbook have been published previously on stonesoup and a number of different locations. I've pulled them into one handy e-book that you can keep on your computer, ready to inspire and answer the eternal question ' What's for dinner?".

5 ingredients
Each recipe can be made with 5 ingredients or less. There are a few that don't use the whole 5, so don't stress if there are only 4 or 3 ingredients.

To keep it realistic, the 5 ingedients do not include salt, pepper or olive oil. Since most recipes will use all three of these, please note that they're expected to be in your pantry.

10 minutes
This is a guideline for how long each recipe will take to prepare to be ready to eat. But everyone cooks at different speeds, so some people may take a little longer especially the first time cooking a particular dish.

I put out a challenge on *stonesoup* recently and most people were able to make the recipes in the 10 minutes, but a few did take longer.

snacks & starters

warm butter beans with rosemary & garlic

serves 4 as a starter

You can either serve this as bruschetta with the beans dished up on toast that has been rubbed with the cut side of a clove of garlic. Alternatively, serve the beans in the middle of the table with bread on the side so your guests can help themselves.

I've made this with cannellini beans and butter beans and I have a slight preference for the slightly larger, firmer butter beans. Borlotti beans would also work well as would chickpeas.

1 can butter beans (400g /14oz), drained
1-2 cloves garlic, peeled & finely sliced
2 small sprigs rosemary, leaves picked
pinch chilli flakes, optional

Heat a small frying pan over a medium heat and add 3 tablespoons olive oil. Add remaining ingredients and stir fry beans until they are golden and warmed through.

Season well and serve with a drizzle of peppery extra virgin olive oil.

crostini with smoked salmon & sour cream

This is one of those effortless starters that feels a little bit special but can be made in a flash from ingredients from your supermarket.

If you don't have access to capers, chopped chives or parsley would work well. It's more about getting some visual greenery and freshness.

Baguettes are lovely for crostini but I've also used crackers or larger slices of sourdough cut into small, bite sized pieces.

8 thin slices baguette
100g (3 oz) smoked salmon, sliced
sour cream
capers
lemon cheeks, to serve

Toast baguette slices lightly on one side.

Layer each round with smoked salmon, top with a dollup of sour cream and sprinkle with a few capers and lots of freshly ground black pepper.

crostini with buffalo mozzarella, peppers & basil

serves 4 as a starter

The success of this starter is all in the cheese. If you can't find the freshest buffalo mozzarella, don't be tempted to use stringy, ordinary mozzarella or boccincini. The best substitute would be a fresh goats cheese or even some humble ricotta.

You can roast the peppers yourself, but I find that the jars of pre-prepared roast peppers or capsicum are perfectly fine if you're short of time.

8 thin slices baguette
1 large ball bufffalo mozzarella, torn into chunks
roasted & peeled red pepper (capsicum), finely sliced
a few fresh basil leaves

Toast baguette slices lightly on one side.

Layer each round with mozzarella chunks, top with a few slices of pepper (capsicum) and a basil leaf or two.

white bean & parmesan puree

Feel free to use whichever white beans you prefer. Canellini, butter beans, borlotti or even fava would all work. I'm also thinking that chickpeas would be lovely but haven't tried them out yet.

This puree is a quick and easy starter to serve with warm pita bread or your favourite dipping vehicle. Another option is to serve it on crostini - thin slices of baguette that have been toasted on one side and rubbed with a cut clove of garlic while still hot.

- 1 can canellini beans (400g /14oz), drained
- 1 - 2 cloves garlic
- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 60g (2oz) parmesan cheese, finely grated
- 3 - 4 tablespoons lemon juice

Place all ingredients in a food processor and whizz until very smooth.

Season to taste, adding a little more lemon juice if you think it needs it.

Serve at room temperature with pita or other bread.

cheese with celery

This is more of an idea than an exact recipe. It came from wanting to enjoy some cheese without the heaviness of bread or crackers.

There's something just so good about crunching into a stick of celery and even better when it has a bonus piece of rich soft cheese attached.

This works best with softer cheese but I've also tried it successfully with parmesan and manchego.

bunch celery
perfectly ripe cheese

Wash celery and trim the base to break it into individual ribs. Leave the leaves intact on the inner ribs and discard the darker green leaves of the outer ribs.

Place celery on a platter next to the cheese and season with salt & pepper.

bocadillo with jamon

The humble bocadillo is the ultimate minimalist Spanish sandwich. Just a baguette filled with some meat, cheese, omelette or tuna. The Spanish do not add lettuce, pickles, onions, mustard or mayonnaise to their bocadillo. Sometimes the bread is moistened by rubbing the cut side of a tomato onto the bread, or drizzling some olive oil – or both. But mostly it's just bread and one filling. I find good quality jamon is flavoursome and moist enough to enjoy on its own.

If you're lucky enough to be in Spain you could make this sandwich with a different type of jamon every day. Proscuitto or parma ham would make good substitutes.

If you're feeling nervous that your sandwich will be too dry, serve with some good extra virgin olive oil on the side. But please try it without the oil first.

1/2 – 1/3 baguette
2 – 4 slices jamon

Break open baguette.

Layer with jamon, close up and enjoy.

cheese on toast

The choice of cheese is in your court. The mayo makes it a bit moister so you could easily use hard cheese such as parmesan or manchengo. For me right now, Irish cheddar is where it's at.

Also lovely with a slice or two of smoked ham layered under the cheese. For an even more rich experience replace the mayo with an egg yolk.

- 2 slices rustic bread
- butter
- 2 handfuls grated cheese
- 1 teaspoon wholegrain mustard
- 1tablespoon whole egg mayonnaise

Preheat oven to 250C (480F).

Generously butter bread and place on a baking tray lined with foil or baking paper. Bake for 3 minutes or until butter is melted.

Combine cheese, mustard and mayo. Completely cover the bread with the cheese mixture.

Bake for another 5 minutes or until the cheese is melted and bubbling with golden brown patches.

soup

simple soba noodle soup

serves 1

Soba noodles are made of buckwheat as well as regular wheat and have a subtle 'healthy' flavour. Most other noodles could be used here if you prefer. Likewise, the veg can be varied to suit your taste (and what you have in the fridge!) baby spinach would be lovely.

Remember that the noodles are going to keep cooking in the broth after you've served up so best to slightly undercook first.

1 1/2 cups vegetable stock
handful soba noodles (approx 50g or 2oz)
3 heads baby bok choy, leaves separated
large pinch chilli flakes, optional
1 – 2 tablespoons soy sauce

Bring stock to the boil in a medium saucepan. Add noodles and simmer for 2 minutes.

Add bok choy and chilli and 1T soy sauce and simmer for another minute or until noodles are only just cooked (see note above).

Remove from the heat. Taste and add extra soy if needed. Serve hot.

veggie laksa

Laksa is a wonderful coconut milk based noodle soup that hails from Malaysia. These days you can get commercial laska or other Thai curry pastes that take all the hard work out of it.
I've used Singapore noodles in this recipe which are a fine version of fresh hokkien noodles but I have eaten laksa with rice noodles and even a combination of the two so feel free to substitute.

I've cheated a little on the 5 ingredient rule by including 'mixed chopped vegetables' as a single ingredient. I actually used a carrot, a zucchini and a red pepper, all cut into little batons. Chicken laksa is also really popular. Prawn or shrimps are lovely cooked in the spicy fragrant coconut broth.

350g (3/4lb) fresh Singapore noodles
60g (2oz) Laksa paste or other Thai curry paste
1 large can coconut cream (1 1/2 cups)
2 cups mixed chopped vegetables (see note above)
handful fresh basil leaves

Place noodles in a heatproof bowl and cover with boiling water. Allow to stand for 1 minute then massage to loosen into individual strands. Drain.

Meanwhile heat 2 tablespoons of peanut or other vegetable oil in a large saucepan over high heat. Add curry paste and stir fry for 30 seconds. Quickly add coconut cream and 2 cups boiling water. Bring to the boil and add vegetables. Simmer for 2 minutes or until the vegetables are cooked to your liking.

To serve, divide noodles between 3 bowls. Pour over soup and vegetables and top with basil leaves

chicken & couscous soup

Couscous is brilliant in soup as it cooks quickly and adds a lovely hearty texture to make your soup more of a meal-in-a-bowl.

If you have access to kale or other greens they may be substituted for the baby spinach for a more rustic soup.

- 6 cups chicken stock or broth
- 2 chicken breasts, finely sliced into ribbons
- 1/2 cup couscous
- 2 bags baby spinach, washed
- 4-5 tablespoons lemon juice

Bring the stock to the boil in a large saucepan.

Add chicken and cook for 2 - 3 minutes or until just cooked through. Scoop our the chicken and divide between 4 bowls. Keep warm.

Meanwhile return the broth to the boil. Add couscous and return to the boil then stir through the spinach leaves until they are just wilted. Add lemon juice, season and taste. Add a little more lemon juice if you think it needs it.

Divide couscous and spinach broth between the bowls and serve hot.

zucchini (courgette) soup

erves 3-4

The fastest way to grate zucchini is using a food processor. If you don't have one you could get some exercise and grate with a hand grater. Or just cut the zucchini into small chunks - they'll take a little longer to cook.

The herbs add a some freshness at the end but the soup will be lovely without it.

2 cloves garlic, finely sliced
4 medium zucchini, grated
2 cups tomato passata
1/2 bunch basil or flat leaf parsley, leaves picked
parmesan cheese, to serve

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large saucepan and cook garlic over a high heat for 30 seconds or until just starting to brown. Add zucchini and cook stirring for a couple of minutes. Add passata and 2 cups water and bring to the boil. Simmer for 7-8 minutes or until zucchini is tender.

Taste and season and toss through herbs. Serve with cheese grated on the top.

pea & pasta soup with bacon

This is my take on the classic ham and pea soup.

Frozen peas are a life saver when you're in the mood for something green and the larder is empty. Peas are one of those vegetables that start to loose their natural sweetness and flavour as soon as they are picked so unless you have access to peas straight from the plant, frozen will generally taste better.

I've used bacon instead of ham and served it in chunks on top but you could skip the bacon and use vegetable stock if you wanted a vegetarian soup.

- 4 rashers bacon
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 1/2 packet frozen peas (250g or 1/2lb)
- 200g or 7oz macaroni or other small pasta
- 1/2 bunch chives, chopped, optional

Cook bacon under a broiler or overhead grill until brown and crispy.

Meanwhile bring the stock to the boil in a large saucepan. Add peas and pasta and boil for about 8 minutes or until the pasta is cooked. Stir through chives, if using. Taste and season.

Serve soup topped with bacon pieces.

salads & vegetables

the top 9 stonesoup salad dressings

Top 9? Why not round it out to top 10? Well I thought through my favourite dressings and this is what came up. I could have stretched it to one more but I liked the sound of 9.

I vary my ratios of oil to vinegar etc all the time. The recipes below should be taken as a guide only. Unless otherwise indicated they should make enough to dress a bag of prewashed leaves. But again it's all up to you.

1. ca[illegible]egar & wholegrain mustard

This is my favourite dressing at the moment, especially for a salad to accompany a big fryup for brunch. I've been getting my caramelised red wine vinegar from Norton St Grocer. If you can't find any, regular red wine vinegar with a teaspoon of honey makes a good substitute.

1 tablespoon caramelised red wine vinegar
1 tablespoon wholegrain mustard
3 – 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

2. aged balsamic & olive oil dressing

An oldie but a goodie. I love the sweetness of balsamic that is so well combined with the vinegar during the aging process that it seems to be almost savoury. I have been known to make a 1:1 oil:balsamic dressing if I'm in the mood for something really punchy. But the 1:2 below is more common. Classic to dress peppery wild rocket.

2 tablespoon aged balsamic vinegar
4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

[illegible]

I love tarragon vinegar, it tempers the flavour of fresh tarragon and gives an interesting twist. To make your own, just shove 1/2 bunch tarragon in a bottle of white wine vinegar and allow it to sit for a few weeks. It will keep for ages. This dressing is also lovely with a regular white wine or Champagne vinegar.

1 tablespoon tarragon vinegar
1 tablespoon dijon mustard
4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

4. lemon juice & white wine vinegar dressing

If you're in an indecisive mood, this is the dressing for you. Sometimes I find lemon juice dressings to be a bit too 'lemony' without being sharp enough, this is where the wine vinegar helps.

1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

5. onion & wine vinegar dressing

This is a lovely hearty, almost meaty dressing. I love it to dress a salad of warm lentils but it's also good on leaves. This one keeps well in the fridge which is just as well since it takes a while to make. I LOVE how the onions soak up the vinegar and give little acidic bursts of freshness.

1 large brown onion, finely chopped
1 cup olive oil
1/4 cup sherry or other wine vinegar

Heat oil in a small saucepan and add onion. Simmer over a low heat until onion is soft but not brown. Remove from the heat and add vinegar and season. Allow to sit for at least 10 minutes for the onions to soak up the vinegar.

6. tahini lemon dressing

Inspired by Sam & Sam Clarke of Moro Restaurant and Cookbook fame. I originally discovered this dressing for a roast pumpkin and chickpea salad but it's lovely as a sauce for fish, or even to dress a salad with lots of crunchy greens like snowpeas or fresh asparagus. Haven't yet used it to dress normal leaves.

1 clove garlic, finely pounded
4 tablespoons lemon juice
4 tablespoons tahini
3 tablespoons water
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

7. simple lemon juice dressing

This is easily my most minimalist salad dressing. Forget about the oil and just squeeze lemon juice over. Good with a simple salad of tuna and mixed leaves.

8. the token creamy dressing

I'm not the biggest fan of creamy salads. Something about the way the dressing doesn't look right on the leaves. On potatoes it's another story. This dressing also doubles as a sauce for fish or chicken. The quantities below make a bit over a cup of dressing which will be way more than you need to dress a bag of leaves.

2/3 cup whole egg mayonnaise
1/3 cup natural yoghurt
1 - 2 tablespoons lemon juice
1/2 small clove garlic, crushed, optional

9. caper dressing

Another cooked dressing, this is great for main course salads that have fish or cheese starring in them. I've made it with and without the chives and both are good. It might feel a bit weird to be cooking the parsley but it adds a whole different difficult-to-describe-dimension to the salad.

½ bunch flat leaf parley, leaves picked
½ bunch chives, finely chopped
1 tablespoon capers in salt, well washed
cup extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons lemon juice, or to taste

Place parsley leaves in a strainer and pour over boiling water. Run under the cold water tap, then squeeze dry and chop finely. Place in a small saucepan with capers and remaining oil and heat until it starts to sizzle. Remove from the heat and stir in lemon juice and chives and season.

butter bean & tuna salad

Before I was introuced to butter beans, I used to make this with cannellini or borlotti beans or even chickpeas. All are delicious so by all means mix it up.

I'm a big fan of tuna in oil because it seems to have more flavour. If you're really concerned about your waistline though, you could substitute in tuna in springwater.

One of the best things about this salad, apart from how fresh and tasty it is, is that it transports well and makes a great do-ahead lunch to take to work.

2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 can tuna in oil (185g /6oz), drained
1/4 small red onion, finely diced
1 can butter beans (400g /14oz), drained
handful mixed salad leaves

Combine lemon juice & olive oil in a salad bowl and season.

Add beans and onion to the dressing. Flake tuna into large chunks on top of the beans and gently toss.

brown rice & almond tabbouleh

I've used short grain brown rice. By all means use whichever rice or grain you like best.

I've made this really substantial by adding a heap of almonds. If you were serving as a side dish you could easily get by with a quarter of the nuts or ditch them all together.

Lovely with fish or lamb, it's a brilliant little BBQ salad as it is happy to sit around in the fridge while you hang out with your guests.

2 cups cooked brown rice (approx 250g / 9oz)
1 large bunch flat leaf parsley, coarsley chopped including stalks
1/2 small red onion, finely chopped
1/4 cup lemon juice
1 cup whole almonds (approx 100g / 3oz)

In a large salad bowl stir parsley and onion through the rice.

Combine lemon juice and 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil and season well.

Dress salad and toss though nuts.

warm lentil salad with beets & ricotta

If you're up for roasting your own beets, scrub beets and trim tops. Wrap in foil and bake at 200C (400F) for about an hour or until tender (the bigger your beets the longer they'll take). Cool slightly before using in the salad. To be fair, I was pretty impressed with the canned baby beets I discovered in the supermarket. Packed in beet juice they are a lot closer to home-baked than their old school pickled cousins.

For a more substantial meal, serve with a poached egg on top. Or if you're feeding a die-hard carnivore – fry some chopped bacon or chorizo and stir through the lentils. For our vegan friends, roasted walnuts or pinenuts would make a lovely substitute for the cheese.

1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
1 can lentils (400g or 14oz), drained
2 handfuls flat leaf parsley, leaves picked
1 can baby beets (400g or 14oz), drained
1/2 cup ricotta (approx 150g or 5oz)

Boil your kettle. In a medium bowl mix together balsamic and 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil and season. Place lentils in a strainer and pour over boiling water.

Drain well then toss through the dressing. Mix in the parsley leaves and divide between 2 plates.

Top with drained beets and generous dollups of ricotta.

shaved fennel salad with snowpeas (mangetout) & mint

serves 4 as a side salad

To turn this into a main course salad, serve on a generous bed of soft fresh ricotta, or crumble through some sharp goats cheese.

If you don't have a mandoline or v slicer, you can still make shaved salads with a sharp knife and a steady hand. Your fennel might be a little thicker but it won't be the end of the world. I prefer to slice my fennel lengthwise but if I'm using just a knife if find it easiest to slice crosswise into fine rounds.

- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 small bulb fennel
- 150g (5oz) snowpeas, trimmed
- 1/2 bunch fresh mint, leaves picked

Combine lemon juice and 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil in a medium bowl and season.

Shave fennel into fine slices using a mandoline, v slicer or sharp knife. Toss in the dressing.

Add snowpeas and mint and toss again.

tuna chilli salad

Tuna with chilli oil is my new favourite thing, but feel free to choose plain tuna if you aren't up for a little spice. I like to use the oil from the tuna as a bit of dressing for the salad. By all means use tuna in springwater (drained) if you have a low fat fetish.

- 1 bag pre washed salad leaves
- 1 small or medium can tuna in oil with chilli
- 1 lemon

Place leaves in a medium bowl.

Flake tuna and chilli oil onto the salad. Drizzle over lemon juice and toss gently.

baby spinach salad with couscous & almonds

If you want this salad to have a lighter, more summery feel. Halve the amount of baby spinach and skip the wilting step.

1/2 cup couscous
1 teaspoon ground cumin
2 bags baby spinach
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
large handful almonds, roasted & roughly chopped

Place couscous and cumin in a heatproof bowl. Pour over 1/2 cup boiling water, cover and allow to stand for 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, place a medium saucepan over a medium high heat. Add two thirds of the baby spinach and cook, stirring constantly until spinach has just wilted.

Remove from the heat and stir through olive oil, vinegar and couscous. Season and transfer to a large salad bowl. Toss through remaining spinach and sprinkle over almonds.

crisp beef & balsamic salad with ricotta

When a recipe calls for dusting meat in flour before cooking, I usually give it a miss but for some reason tried it out on this salad and was so impressed with the lovely crunchy texture that it gave the meat. Worth the effort. If you need it to be gluten free, rice or potato or even corn (maize) flour should all work.

If you can't get your hands on radicchio don't worry. Just substitute in you favourite lettuce or even mixed leaves.

300g (10oz) piece steak, finely sliced into bite sized pieces
3 tablespoons plain flour
2 tablespoons aged balsamic vinegar
1 head radicchio or other lettuce, leaves torn
200g (7oz) ricotta

Place a large frying pan over a high heat. Season flour well and toss beef pieces until well coated.

Heat enough olive oil in the pan to just cover the base. When it starts to smoke, quickly fry the steak turning once or twice until deeply golden. Drain on paper towel.

Mix balsamic with 2 tablespoons extra virgin oil and season. Toss lettuce leaves so they are well coated in the dressing.

To serve, smear the ricotta over two plates. Top with leaves and the beef.

chickpea & parmesan salad

The tricky thing with this salad is that a whole tin of chickpeas can be quite a big eat. If you're not super hungry feel free to ditch some of the chickpeas.

If you don't have any leaves, the salad is lovely without them.

1 bag pre washed salad leaves
1 can chickpeas (400g /14oz), drained
1 lemon
1 small handful shredded parmesan cheese

Places leaves in a large bowl. Add the chickpeas. Drizzle with a little lemon juice and toss.

Taste and add more lemon if you think it needs it. Season. Sprinkle over cheese.

shaved zucchini (courgette) & mint salad

serves

I've been a big fan of shaved salads for a while now. This is an adaptation of a recipe I published earlier. It works really well as a side dish for fish but also makes a lovely accompaniment to barbequed meat, especially lamb.

- 4 medium zucchini
- 2 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/2 bunch mint, leaves picked and torn
- 1/2 thin skinned lemon, scrubbed and finely sliced into rounds, optional

Thinly shave the zucchini lengthwise using a v-slicer, mandoline, vegetable peeler or sharp knife.

Combine lemon juice and 5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil in a bowl and season well. Add zucchini and toss through. Allow to stand for a few minutes to absorb the dressing.

Take lemon slices and cut into tiny wedge shaped segments leaving the skin on. Toss mint and lemon through zucchini and serve on a platter.

shaved cabbage salad with parmesan & balsamic

The secret to this salad is to make sure your knife is sharp and your hand steady. We want the finest shavings here, not chunky ribbons. I tend to be pretty ruthless at discarding any chunky bits that are going to mess with my salad texture, but it's up to you.

Great as a side dish to pasta especially if it happens to be served alongside fresh tagliatelle al ragu cooked by a cute Irishman.

1/2 white or Savoy cabbage
2 large handfuls parmigiano reggiano, finely grated
aged balsamic vinegar (preferably >8 years old)

Discard outer leaves of your cabbage and then get to work shaving as finely as you can with a sharp knife, discarding any thick ribs as you go. Place in a large bowl, drizzle over 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil and toss. If the salad seems a little dry, add some more oil.

Toss though cheese and season. Arrange on a serving platter or salad bowl and drizzle over a sparing amount of balsamic.

broccoli with chickpeas & tahini sauce

This is broccoli at it's best. Crunchy and fresh in some spots, caramelised and complex in others. It seems like so much more than, well, just broccoli.

Tahini is a paste of ground sesame seeds and is available from most health food stores. Natural yoghurt and lemon juice, without the water make a good substitute.

- 1 head broccoli, chopped into bite sized mini-trees
- 1 can chickpeas (14oz / 400g), drained
- 2 tablespoons tahini
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice

Preheat a large frying pan on the hottest heat. Add 2 tablespoon olive oil to pan. When it starts to smoke add the broccoli and cover with a lid or an oven tray – it's critical to seal it so the broccoli fries from the bottom but steams at the top.

After 2 minutes, remove the lid and stir. Return lid and cook for a further 2 minutes. Add the chickpeas and stir. Cover and cook for another minute.

Test a piece of broccoli – if it's tender, remove from the heat. If not, cover and cook for another few minutes. Season.

Meanwhile, combine tahini and lemon juice with 2 tablespoons water and stir until you have a smooth sauce.

Serve broccoli and chickpeas with tahini sauce drizzled over the top.

wilted greens with parmesan

My favourite greens for this dish are either kale or cavalo nero (also known as Tusan cabbage) but it's also lovely with plain old spinach or silverbeet.

It is one of my all time favourite single gal meals. Quick and easy and so, so good for you. It's also surprisingly versatile.

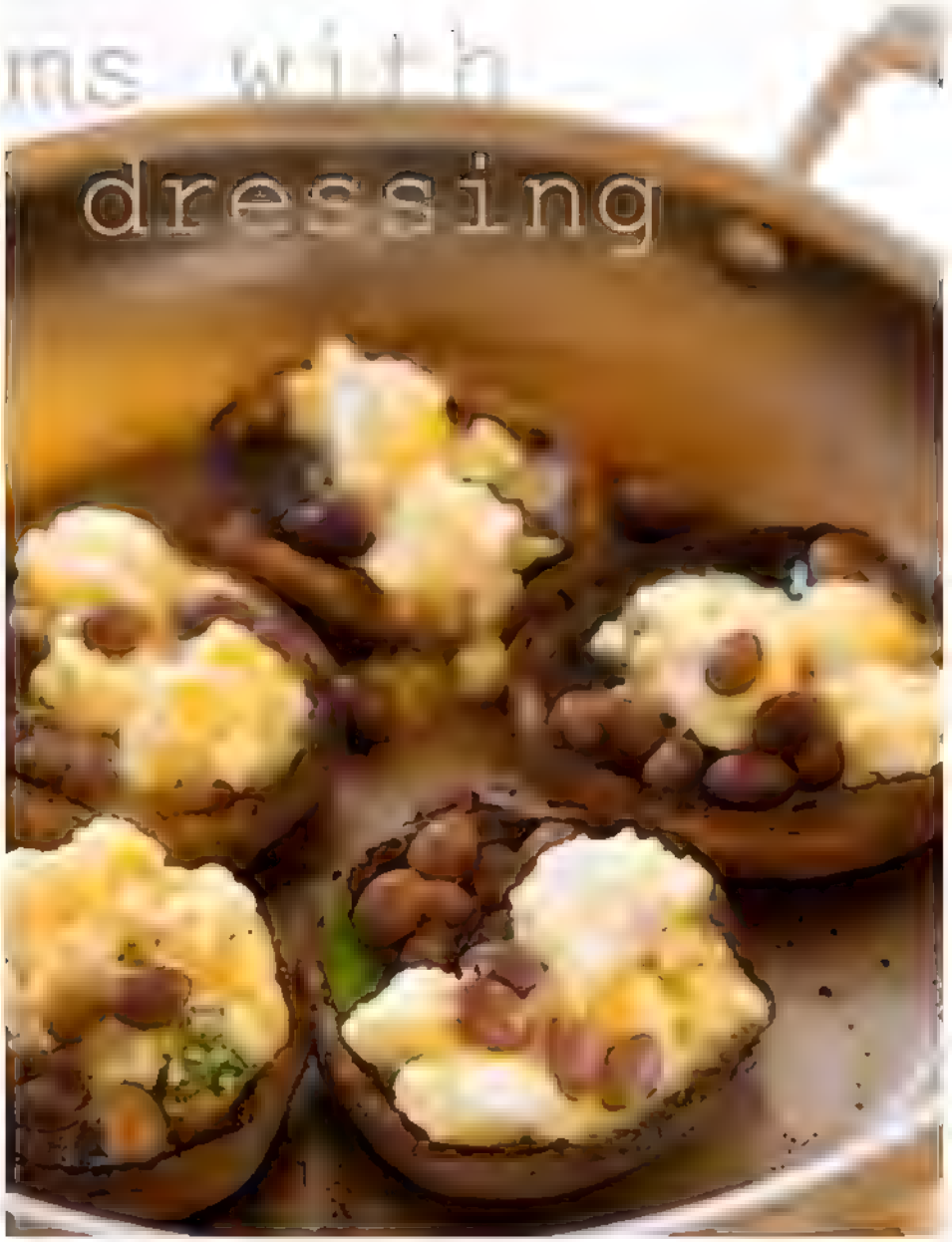
The cheese can be substituted with all manner of things. Sometimes I poach an egg, or just toast some pinenuts to sprinkle on top. If I'm craving a fish hit I've also been known to toss through a can of sardines – but I appreciate this isn't for everyone. It can also be a great way to use up leftover ragu or even risotto.

1-2 cloves garlic, peeled & finely sliced
1 bunch or about 4 large handfuls cavalo nero (or other greens – see note above)
1/2 lemon
1 handful grated parmesan cheese

Heat 2 tablespoon olive oil in a large frying pan or saucepan over a medium high heat. Add garlic and cook until it just starts to brown. Add greens and stir fry until just wilted.

Remove from the heat. Squeeze through a little lemon juice. Taste and season. Serve on a warm plate with parmesan sprinkled over and extra lemon on the side.

field mushrooms with feta & olive dressing



This is a great thing to serve vegetarian guests who wil be so excited that you've gone beyond the standard veggie lasagne or risotto. The dressing also tastes great with lamb chops so you could cook up a few if you need to keep any carnivores placated.

Serve with some crusty bread or mashed potato to soak up the mushroomy dressing juices and a simple green salad.

- 4 large field mushrooms
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon dijon mustard
- 200g (3 1/2oz) marinated feta
- handful small olives

Heat a large frying pan on the highest heat. Add a few tablespoons olive oil and add the mushies. Cover and cook for about 4 minutes. Turn and cook for another 4 minutes or until mushrooms are soft.

Meanwhile, mix vinegar and mustard with 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil.

When mushies are cooked, turn stalk side up. Divide clumps of feta between the mushrooms and drizzle over feta and olives. Allow the dressing to warm through before serving.

pan fried brussels sprouts

I know many people who absolutely hate brussels sprouts, or at least they did until they tried them cooked this way. I've converted more than a handful of people with this recipe.

Pan fried with smoky bacon, the sprouts are sweet and slightly oniony and have none of that aweful boiled cabbage flavour.

500g (1lb) Brussels sprouts
60g (2oz) pancetta, smoked spec, or bacon, chopped
2 large sprigs sage, leaves picked, optional
2 cloves garlic, finely sliced
squeeze of lemon juice

Trim the base of your sprouts and peel away the dark green outer leaves. You can either discard these or add them to the pan but they will add a stronger more cabbagey flavour so probably best to omit them on your first attempt. Take the trimmed sprouts and finely slice lengthwise into 4 or 5 slices.

Heat a small frying pan over a medium heat. Add a few tablespoons olive oil and allow to warm for a few seconds before adding the pancetta, spec or bacon. Cook for a minute or two and then add the trimmed sprouts, sage and garlic. Saute, stirring regularly for approximately 10 minutes or until the sprouts are starting to soften and take on a golden colour.

pasta & noodles

pasta with broccoli & pinenuts

The beauty of this dish, apart from the speed to plate, is how the broccoli takes on the lightly creamy, cheesey sauce. I find myself always wishing there was more broccoli and less pasta when I eat it.

400g (14oz) short pasta
2 bunches broccoli, cut into florettes
1/2 cup pouring cream
2 handfuls pinenuts, toasted
2 large handfuls grated parmesan cheese

Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil. Check the cooking time for your pasta on the pack. Set your timer to go off three minutes before the pasta will be done.

Cook pasta and when the timer buzzes, pop in the broccoli and continue to cook for the remaining three minutes or until the pasta is al dente and the broccoli bright green and cooked through. Reserve a cup of the cooking water then drain.

Place the saucepan back on a low heat and add the cream, pasta and broccoli. Toss to combine then add the pinenuts and cheese. Stir until the cheese has melted. If it looks a little dry, add some reserved pasta water.

Taste and season.

linguini with rocket & chilli oil

This is the perfect mid week meal. All it takes is boiling the water for the pasta, grating some parmesan and you're done. If you feel inspired to make your own chilli oil there's a recipe on stonesoup

200g (7oz) linguine
4 tablespoon chilli & garlic oil
1 tablespoon lemon juice
small handful grated parmesan cheese
large handful wild rocket (arugula)

Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil & cook pasta until al dente.

Meanwhile combine chilli oil & lemon juice in a bowl large enough to hold the pasta.

Scoop some cooking water into a cup and then drain pasta. Toss drained pasta in the bowl with the chilli oil mix and then stir through the cheese and rocket. If it looks dry add some of the reserved pasta cooking water.

spaghetti with rosemary & garlic

This may sound really boring but at the moment it's my latest favourite meal. Rosemary and garlic work so well together and turn the oil into a surprisingly complex aromatic sauce for pasta.

If you aren't lucky enough to grow rosemary or have a neighbour who does, feel free to leave it out or substitute in any other herbs you happen to have access to. If all else fails, a little dried chilli will make a different but delicious alternative.

200g (7oz) spaghetti
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 large sprig rosemary, leaves picked
1-2 cloves garlic, peeled & finely sliced

Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil. Cook pasta according to the packet directions.

Meanwhile, heat 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil in a small saucepan over medium. Add rosemary & garlic and fry until garlic is golden and the rosemary has gone crispy. Remove from the heat.

When the pasta is cooked, scoop up a mug full of cooking water then drain the pasta well. Return drained pasta to the hot saucepan and add the flavoured oil. Toss, taste and season. If it looks dry, add a little cooking water from the mug.

pasta with pork sausages & crushed peas

I LOVE this pasta. The sweet crushed peas make it feel healthy enough that you don't need a salad as well and the sausages give it a lovely richness that is very satisfying. The secret here is using the best quality pork sausages you can find.

350g (3/4lb) short pasta
4 pork & garlic sausages
250g (1/2lb) frozen peas
1 bunch mint, leaves picked
2 large handfuls grated parmesan cheese + extra to serve

Bring a large saucepan salted water to the boil and cook pasta according to the packet directions.

Meanwhile, heat 3 tablespoons olive oil in a large frying pan over a high heat. Remove sausage skins and crumble them into the pan. Cook stirring frequently until browned all over.

Add peas, squashing down to roughly crush them. When the peas are warm, through toss through mint and remove from the heat.

Drain pasta and toss through the parmesan and sausages.

Season and serve with extra cheese passed separately.

pasta with ricotta

Adapted from Rosa Mitchell's inspirational book, My Cousin Rosa.

If you're in the mood to experiment Rosa recommends trying it with pesto and parmesan or diced ripe tomatoes and basil, or with bacon peas and parmesan. But she's right that the ricotta alone is mighty fine. I've also experimented with flaked good quality tuna in oil and a squeeze of lemon.

400g (12oz) short pasta
200g – 250g (7oz - 9oz) ricotta
2 sprigs parsley, leaves picked & chopped
freshly grated parmesan cheese, to serve

Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil and cook pasta according to the packet directions.

Mash ricotta with a fork. When the pasta is done, reserve a cup full of cooking water. Drain pasta and return to the saucepan. Stir through ricotta and parsley. If it looks too dry stir through some of the cooking water until it looks good.

Season and serve hot with cheese on the side.

minimalist pesto

This method is minimalist in that it doesn't need any special equipment like a food processor. If you do have a food processor or a mortar and pestle by all means use them.

Brilliant on sandwiches or dolluped in soups. Very good mates with anything tomatoey. Also lovely with avocado on toast. Drizzle with some more oil and keep in the fridge for up to a week.

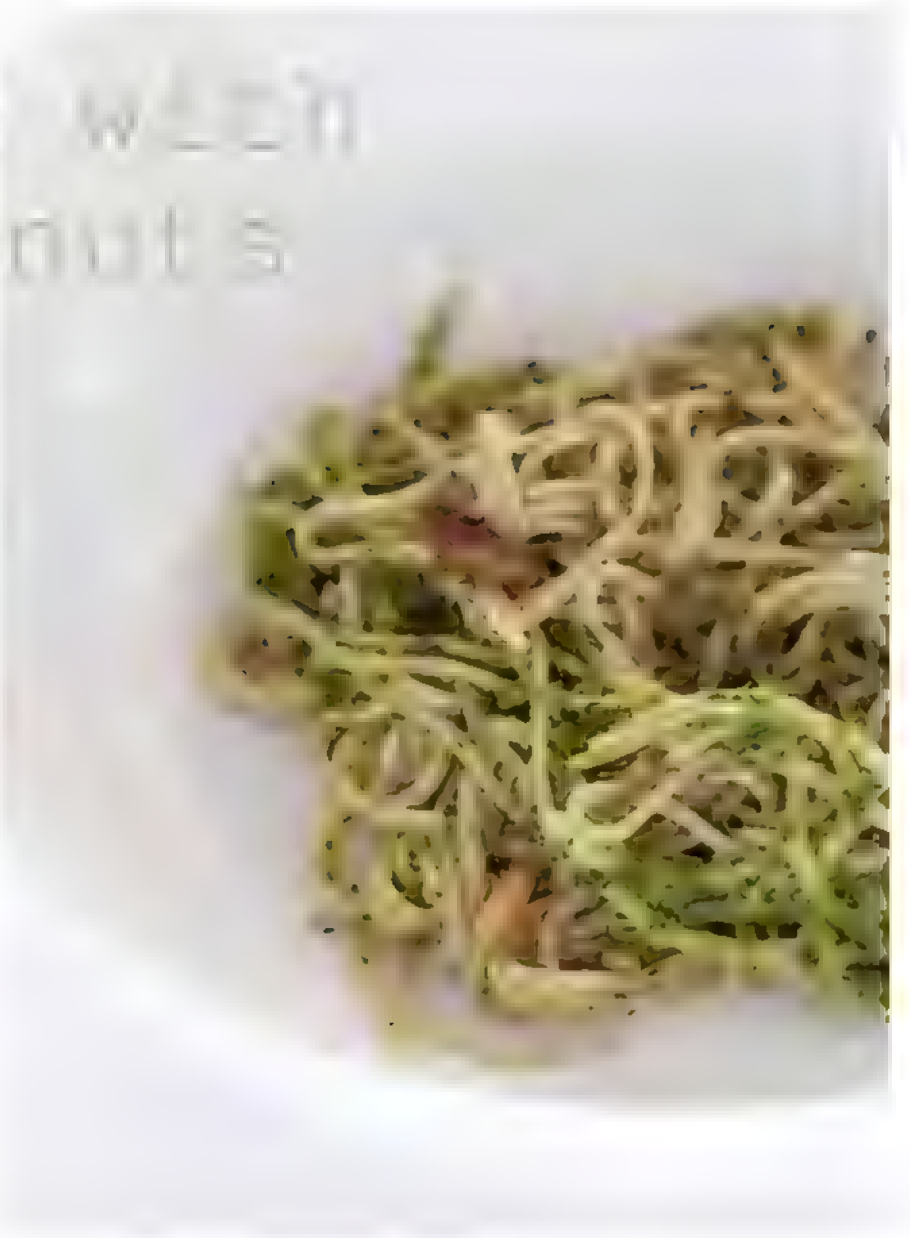
1 large bunch basil, leaves picked
1 clove garlic, peeled & finely chopped
1 handful pinenuts
2 large handfuls grated parmesan
extra virgin olive oil

Wash and dry your basil then place in a clean plastic bag. Pound with your fist or a meat mallet until the leaves are bruised – this help release the basil aroma and makes it easer to chop in the next step.

Place bruised basil, garlic and pinenuts on a large chopping board. Chop and keep on chopping until everything is finely chopped and starting to look like gremolata. Transfer to a mixing bowl and stir through enough olive oil to make a rough paste.

Stir through cheese. Taste and season.

soba noodles with pesto & pinenuts



For something a little different, try Japanese soba noodles tossed with pesto and toasted pinenuts. Super simple.

If you don't have time to make your own there are some good commercial pestos out there. I find the best are the 'fresh' type stored in the refrigerator section of my favourite deli.

200g (7oz) dried soba noodles
4 tablespoons pesto
1 handful pinenuts, toasted
parmesan cheese to serve.

Bring a medum saucepan of water to the boil. Simmer noodles for 4 minutes. Drain and return to the saucepan.

Stir through pesto and pinenuts and add a little extra virgin olive oil if it looks too dry. Taste and season.

Serve with parmesan passed separately.

2 minute noodles with bok choy & oyster sauce

If the thought of using 2 minute noodles disturbs you, by all means try another noodle but I was pleasantly surprised how lovely they were with the fresh greens and the savoury sauce.

If you can't find bok choy, any other asian greens would work or you could just use a big bunch of English spinach.

1 packet 2 minute noodles – chicken flavour
1 bunch baby bok choy, separated into individual leaves
1/3 cup oyster sauce
1 teaspoon sesame oil

Place about 2 cups water in a medium saucepan and add the flavour sachet from the noodles and bring to the boil.

Add bok choy and noodles and simmer for 2 minutes until noodles are cooked and the bok choy is wilted.

Drain and return to the pan. Stir through oyster sauce and oil and serve hot.

zucchini (courgette) noodles

It's unusual to serve Asian noodles with an Italian-style sauce but it works surprisingly well and is much quicker than having to cook a pot of pasta.

If you're not in the mood for carbs I highly recommend cooking the zucchini like this and tossing through some basil or fresh mint to serve as a side dish.

- 200g (6oz) fresh hokkien or singapore noodles
- 4 zucchini finely sliced into coins
- 2 egg yolks
- 2 handfuls grated parmesan cheese + extra to serve
- 4 sprigs basil, leaves picked & torn

Boil the kettle and get a large frying pan on a high heat. Place the noodles in a heatproof bowl and cover with boiling water.

Heat 1-2 tablespoons everyday olive oil in a large frying pan over a very high heat. Add zucchini and reduce heat to medium high. Cook stirring occasionally.

When the zucchini is lovely and tender, drain the noodles and return to the heatproof bowl.

Stir through egg yolk, cheese, zucchini and basil and season.

rice noodles with chicken & lime

This is based on the Thai dish 'larb' which is a fresh, fragrant stirfry of ground chicken or pork. If you don't want to invest in a bottle of fish sauce you could use 1/4 cup soy sauce instead. It will be slightly more salty and heavy but still lovely and fresh with the lime and herbs.

Dried rice noodles are an excellent option when you're catering for people with wheat and gluten sensitivity.

Another allergen note. Most soy sauces contain some wheat derivitaves and aren't suitable for gluten free diets. The Japanese soy sauce known as Tamari does not contain wheat so look for this if you need to.

375g (3/4lb) rice sticks (dried rice noodles)
600g (1 1/2lb) minced (ground) chicken
1/3 cup fish sauce
1/4 cup lime juice + lime halves to serve
1 bunch coriander or fresh mint, leaves picked

Place noodles in a large heatproof bowl. Cover with boiling water and allow to soften.

Heat some peanut or vegetable oil in a large wok or frying pan. Cook chicken over high heat until well browned. Drain noodles and add to pan.

Cook until noodles are heated through and softened. Add fish sauce and stir for a few seconds. Remove from the heat and toss through lime juice and herbs.

hokkien noodles with tofu, honey & soy

Hokkien noodles are fresh wheat based noodles that are a lot like fresh fat spaghetti. They are usually in the chiller section of the supermarket, although I have seen some that are shelf stable in the Asian food section. If you can't find hokkien noodles any other thick wheat based noodle would work well or even some spaghetti or bucatini.

If you're not a fan of tofu, feel free to substitute in finely sliced chicken breast or even beef.

- 500g (1lb) fresh hokkien or singapore noodles
- 300g (10oz) firm tofu, chopped into large chunks
- 1/3 cup soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 6 green onions, finely sliced

Place noodles in a heatproof bowl and cover with boiling water. Allow to stand for 1 minute then massage to loosen into individual strands.

Meanwhile, heat some peanut or other vegetable oil in a large wok or frying pan. Add tofu and stir fry until golden brown. Mix together soy and honey in a small bowl then add to the wok. Stir and allow to cook until slightly reduced.

Drain and toss through noodles and green onion and serve hot.

smoked tofu cabonara

I was surprised how much I liked smoked tofu. While it would never actually replace bacon in my diet, it is something that I'll continue to eat. Good for when you feel like smoky bacon but don't feel like eating meat.

Feel free to use the pasta of your choice, although I think short pasta is better here for some reason.

150g (5oz) pasta
200g (7oz) firm smoked tofu
2 egg yolks
2 handfuls finely grated parmesan
1/2 bunch chives, chopped

Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil and cook the pasta according to the packet directions.

Heat a large frying pan over a medium high heat with a few tablespoons peanut oil. Cut tofu into batons no larger than your pasta and pat dry with paper towel. Fry tofu until golden on all sides then transfer to a large warm bowl. Toss through egg yolks and cheese.

When the pasta is ready, scoop out a little cooking water into a mug then drain the pasta. Toss hot pasta through the tofu mixture, adding a little of the reserved cooking water if your pasta looks too dry. Toss through chives and serve hot with extra parmesan passed separately.

grain & legumes

arm chickpea
salad with
ary & garlic

Think of this as a base to play around with. For me it's perfect as is, but if you don't have almonds, most other nuts would work. Or you could leave them out all together and serve the chickpeas with a sprinkling of finely grated parmesan instead.

If you were in the mood for some greenery, a handful of salad leaves tossed through at the end wouldn't go astray. Neither would a nice little side salad, but it is completely satisfying on it's own.

1 clove garlic, peeled & finely sliced
1 sprig rosemary, leaves picked
pinch dried chilli flakes, optional
small handful whole almonds, almonds
1 can chickpeas, (400g / 14oz) drained

Heat a medium frying pan over a medium high heat. Add 2 tablespoon olive oil. When the oil is hot add garlic, rosemary, chilli and almonds (if using) and stir fry or a minute or so, until the garlic is just starting to brown.

Toss through drained chickpeas and continue to stir fry until chickpeas are warm and golden. Season.

couscous with tuna & cherry tomato sauce

I LOVE tuna in all its forms but I know there are some tuna snobs out there who think that the tinned stuff is bad. Trust me, good quality tuna in olive oil can be a thing of beauty – granted it is completely different to fresh tuna – think of it as a totally new food. And it's so handy to have in the pantry for an emergency meal.

1 cup couscous
1/2 bunch green onions (scallions or shallots), chopped
2 cloved garlic, finely sliced
1 medium tin tuna in olive oil (190g / 7oz)
1 punnet cherry tomatoes, halved

Boil the kettle.

Place couscous and green onions in a medium saucepan. Pour over 3/4 cup boiling water, 2 tablespoons olive oil and a generous seasoning of salt and pepper. Stir and cover. Stand.

Place garlic, tuna (with oil) and tomatoes in a medium frying pan over a high heat. Cook, stirring frequently until the tomatoes have broken down a little and everything looks saucy. Taste and season.

Fluff couscous with a fork and serve topped with the tomato sauce.

egg fried rice

I can't believe how deliciously moreish this egg fried rice is. Even on its own it tastes far more complex than just egg, rice and soy sauce.

And the best thing is that it's the perfect blank canvas to build a meal around. Need some greens? Throw in a handful of frozen peas, or some chopped spring onion and you're in business. Pretty much any veg will work, of course some will need to be cooked first. It would also be lovely as an accompaniment to a stir fry or even just some wilted greens tossed in oyster sauce.

If you are cooking rice freshly to make fried rice, be sure and spread it out on a tray and allow to cool for half an hour or so to give the starch a chance to be in the right frame of mind for some frying.

2 cups cooked long grain rice (approx 250g / 9oz)
2 eggs, lightly beaten
2 tablespoons soy sauce, + extra to serve

Heat a wok or large frying pan over a medium high heat. Add about 2 tablespoons peanut or other neutral oil and allow to heat.

Add egg and toss for about 30 seconds so it starts to cook then add the rice and continue to stir fry until the rice is heated through and the egg is cooked.

Stir through soy and taste. Add a little more if needed. Serve hot with the soy bottle at the ready.

canned lentils with sausage & tomato

I hadn't even heard of canned lentils until a few months ago. Now I'm always looking for excuses to use them. Super simple and quick, they're packed with all the protein and goodness you expect from the humble lentil.

If you can't get your hands on lentils, canned beans would make a good substitute.

- 3 good quality pork sausages, preferably Italian style
- 2 cans lentils (14oz or 400g each), drained
- 1 punnet cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 handful flat leaf parsley, leaves picked

Heat 2 tablespoon olive oil in a medium frying pan over a high heat. Remove sausage skins and crumble the meat into bight sized pieces. Stir fry sausage until browned and cooked through.

Stir through lentils and allow to warm for a minute. Remove from heat and stir through remaining ingredients. Season.

rice & lentils

Serve it as a one-bowl meal with natural yoghurt like I have here. Or use it as a more protein-rich alternative to plain rice to serve with a veggie curry.

1 onion, peeled & finely diced
large pinch dried chilli flakes
2 cups cooked rice (approx 250g / 9oz)
1 can lentils (400g /14oz), drained
natural yoghurt, to serve (omit for vegans)

Heat a few tablespoons olive oil in a medium frying pan. Add onion and chilli and cook over a high heat stirring frequently until softened and starting to brown.

Add rice and lentils and stir fry for a few more minutes until both are heated through.

Season and serve with a dollup of yoghurt.

pan fried tofu with spiced yoghurt

Inspired by the lovely Heidi of 101 cookbooks and her cumin spiked tofu. Actually if you're looking for more tofu ideas, I'd highly recommend Heidi's blog.

Heidi serves her tofu with a warm carrot salad which is absolutely lovely.

400g (14oz) firm tofu
2 teaspoon ground cumin
2 teaspoons garam marsala
1 cup natural yoghurt

Cut tofu into slices about 6mm (1/4 inch) thick and pat dry with paper towel.

Heat a large frying pan on medium high and add a few tablespoons peanut or olive oil. Cook tofu until brown and crisp on both sides.

Meanwhile combine yoghurt and spices and season well.

fish, eggs & meat

pan fried salmon with tahini sauce & salad

Tahini is ground up sesame seeds and is available from health food stores and the health food section of the supermarket. If you can't get your hands on tahini you could just serve the salmon with a wedge of lemon.

I usually buy my fish with the skin still on because I love it when it gets all crispy. But it will still be lovely without skin .

- 4 tablespoon tahini
- 8 tablespoons lemon juice
- 4 salmon fillets
- 2 small bulbs fennel, very finely sliced crosswise
- 1 bunch mint, leaves picked

Combine tahini and lemon. Add a little water until it is a good sauce consistency.

Heat 3 tablespoons olive oil in a medium frying pan over medium heat. Season salmon and cook skin side down for 3 minutes or until the skin is crispy and starting to go brown. Turn and cook the other side until cooked to your liking. About 2 minutes.

Meanwhile combine mint and sliced fennel.To serve, spread a bed of tahini over the base of each plate. Top with a little of the mint and fennel and lastly the fish.

snapper parcels with green bean cherry tomatoes

Substitute the freshest white fish fillets available if you can't find snapper.

- 4 snapper fillets
- 2 large handfuls green beans (approx 1lb / 450g), tops trimmed
- 2 punnets cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 bunch basil, leaves picked
- lemon cheeks, to serve

Preheat oven on it's highest setting.

Lay out 4 squares of foil or baking paper. Divide beans, tomato and basil leaves between each square. Top with fish, skin side down. Season and drizzle over a generous amount of olive oil - about 1 tablespoon per parcel. Seal each parcel and place on a baking tray.

Cook for 8 minutes, open up one of the parcels to see if the fish is cooked. It might need a few more minutes.

Serve each parcel on a plate with a lemon cheek.

mussels with leeks & chilli

Inspired by the lovely Miss Reaneybean.

I've recently discovered pot ready mussels at the fish market which come packed live and are scrubbed, debearded and ready to cook. They last for a few days in the fridge.

The secret to cooking mussels is to treat each one as an individual. When the first mussels have opened pop them in a prewarmed bowl to wait while you keep cooking their more hardy sibblings.

1 leek, white part finely sliced into rings
1-2 cloves garlic, peeled & finely sliced
3-5 large red chillis, halved lengthwise
1/2 cup dry white wine
1kg mussels, scrubbed & debearded

Cook leeks in 2 tabelspoons olive oil over a medium heat in a large saucepan. Stir occasionally until leeks are meltingly soft.

Add chilli and garlic and cook for another minute. Increase heat to high, add wine and bring to the boil. Add mussels and cover with a lid. Cook for 3 minutes. Give the pot a shake and remove lid. Fish out any opened mussels and place in a large bowl. Cover the pot and keep cooking for another few minutes. Shake and again remove any opened mussels.

Discard any that haven't opened at this stage and return the opened mussels to the pot to warm through. Divide between 2 bowls. Great with some crusty bread or even some hot salty fries.

simple prawns (shrimp) with yoghurt mayo

I love this yoghurt mayo - a simple blend of virtuous natural yoghurt and sinful whole egg mayonnaise it's a super easy and versatile sauce. Great with all fish and seafood and also delicious with roast chicken. Definitely something I keep coming back to.

- 4 tablespoons natural greek style yoghurt
- 4 tablespoons whole egg mayonnaise
- 1kg / 2lb cooked prawns / shrimp
- mixed salad leaves, to serve

Combine yoghurt and mayonnaise. Season.

Divide prawns between 4 plates and serve with a handful of leaves and a small bowl of sauce on the side. If you're feeling fancy you can serve little finger bowls so everyone can wash their hands.

pan fried salmon with broccolini & seared lemon

Broccolini is like a baby version of broccoli. The stems are lovely and tender, a little like a cross between asparagus and broccoli and just bursting with green goodness. Regular broccoli or asparagus would also work well.

The secret to this dish is cooking the lemons with the fish. The heat caramelised the surface and helps to release the juices leaving you with an instant sauce to squeeze over your fish.

3 bunches broccolini (or 2 heads broccoli)
juice and zest of 1 lemon
4 salmon fillets, (approx 200g / 7oz) each
4 lemon halves, extra

Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil. Cook broccolini for 3 - 4 minutes or until just tender. Drain and toss through lemon juice, zest and 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Season and keep warm.

Preheat a large frying pan or BBQ to medium high. Rub salmon generously with extra olive oil and season well.

Cook salmon skin side down for 3 - 4 minutes. Turn and add lemon halves to the pan cut side down. Sear on the other side for another 3 - 4 minutes or until cooked to your liking.

Divide broccolini between four plates. Top each with a piece of salmon and serve with lemon halves on the side.

ricotta & basil open omelette

If you're a fan of commercial 'non-stick' tefflon pans, by all means go ahead, but I think it's really worth the effort of investing the time in seasoning a traditionally cast iron pan yourself (see instructions on stonesoup). You'll be guaranteed an omelette that comes free quite readily every time, without having to worry about where the tefflon has gone when it wears off the base of your pan.

Basil and ricotta is by far our favorite topping at the moment but feel free to mix things up. A soft goat's cheese can be lovely but if you're up for something more hearty, chorizo and cooked potato chunks could be just the thing.

5 eggs
1 tablespoon butter
handful, finely grated parmesan, optional
2 tablespoons ricotta
6 basil leaves, picked

Lightly whisk eggs and season. Heat your omelette pan over a medium high heat until hot but not smoking. Add butter and allow to melt and sizzle without browning then pour in your eggs. Stir quickly to move the cooked part of the egg away from the heat for a couple of minutes.

When the egg is mostly cooked, stop stirring and flatten the top with a spoon and keep cooking for another minute or so until there is only a little runny egg remaining on top. Remove from the heat. Scatter over parmesan, if using, ricotta chunks and basil.

scrambled eggs with ricotta

The best thing about scrambled eggs is that you can cook for as few or as many people as you like and they'll be fine.

Apart from adding some lovely creamy cheesiness, the ricotta makes a massive difference to the texture of your eggs. So even if you overcook them a little they'll still be moist and soft.

Creamed corn is the secret ingredient in these eggs. If you're not into corn, you could always serve it without or take it to a new level with some crab meat or cooked prawns.

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 4 free range eggs, lighly whisked with a fork
- 4 tablespoons canned creamed corn
- large handful parmesan cheese, grated
- 4 tablespoons ricotta

Melt butter in a small saucepan over a medium heat.

Add eggs, corn and parmesan and cook, stirring almost constantly until the eggs are clumpy and still a bit fluid or until cooked to your liking. Remove from the heat.

Stir through ricotta and serve with toast and a green salad.

quick steak sandwich

The great thing about this sandwich is that you pound the meat before cooking. This means it only takes a minute or so on each side to cook. Another benefit is that the meat is tenderised so it doesn't matter if you use slightly tougher cuts, like rump. It also means that the steak ends up in bite sized pieces so there are no akward moments wrestling to chew through your sandwich.

200g (7oz) scotch fillet, rump or New York steak
1 lemon, halved
wholegrain mustard
4 large fresh slices bread
small handful wild baby rocket, optional

Heat BBQ or char grill pan on its highest setting.

Place steak between 2 layers of plastic. Bash with your fist or a meat mallet until it is flattened out to about 1/2cm (3/4in) thick. You want it to be thin as possible with a few holes so it cooks quickly.

Season steak and drizzle over olive oil on both sides. BBQ for approximately 1 minute each size until well charred. At the same time cook the lemon, cut side down.

Place steak on a clean, warm plate and drizzle with more olive oil and a good squeeze of lemon juice. Allow to rest for a few minutes so the meat juices mix with the oil and lemon juice to make a super tasty sauce. Tear meat into bite sized pieces.

Spread bread with mustard then pile the steak on top. Scatter with rocket leaves, if using and drizzle over the juices. Top with another slice of bread.

bacon sarnies

the ultimate hangover cure

The secret to a killer bacon sarnie is top quality bacon. If you're lucky enough to find a butcher who slices their bacon to order, I highly recommend going for 4mm (1/8in) thick slices. They will seem like huge door steps compared to normal bacon but trust me, they're worth it.

If you have to go with pre-sliced, just choose the best quality bacon you can find. Although to be honest, I'm sure even average bacon can still make the world a little more bearable if you are feeling the effects of the morning after the night before.

4-6 rashers bacon approx 4mm (1/8in) thick
salted butter
whole egg mayonnaise
handful wild rocket (arugla), optional
2 soft pannini or 4 thick slices white bread

Preheat your grill or broiler on medium high. Cook bacon, turning occasionally until brown and crisp. Drain on paper towel and keep warm.

Halve and butter your pannini or bread and spread one side generously with mayo. Top with bacon and rocket, if using. Season generously and then form your sandwich.

chorizo with chickpeas & tomato

If you had more time, you could substitute in some boiled kipfler potatoes for the chickpeas.

Most cooks (myself included in the past) recommend cooking dried chickpeas from scratch rather than using canned but to be honest, I often undercook dried chickpeas. And I'd much prefer canned chickpeas to undercooked dried ones – no more guilt about using canned chickpeas.

- 2 chorizo (approx 200g or 7oz), sliced into coins
- 1 can chickpeas (400g or 14oz), drained
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika, optional
- 1 punnet cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1/2 bunch flat leaf parsley, roughly chopped

Preheat a frying pan with 2 tablespoons olive oil on high. Stir fry chorizo until nicely brown on both sides.

Stir through chickpeas & paprika and cook for another minute or two.

Taste, season, and stir through tomato and parsley.

beef & broccoli stir fry

There's something so comforting about minced beef. Add in the fresh healthiness of broccoli and we're talking the perfect midweek dinner.

Lovely on it's own but also great with some steamed rice.

600g (1 1/3lb) minced (ground) beef
2 heads broccoli, cut into bite sized little trees
2 cloves garlic, peeled & finely sliced
4 tablespoons oyster sauce
bunch coriander, roughly chopped with some stems included

Bring a medium saucepan of salted water to the boil. Cook broccoli for 2 minutes and drain.

Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large frying pan and cook beef over a high heat until very brown. Add garlic and cook for another minute.

Add broccoli and sauce and stir through until well heated. Taste and season. Serve sprinkled with coriander.

lamb cutlets with crushed chickpeas & sugar snap peas

Lamb cutlets are wonderful because they cook so quickly. My (almost) niece Lily-belle is also a big fan and calls them 'lollypop chops' because they have a built in 'stick'. Too cute.

Lamb fillets or other types of chops would also work – although you'll need to adjust the cooking time.

- 1 can chickpeas (400g /14oz), drained
- 1 clove garlic, superfinely chopped
- 2-3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 4-6 lamb cutlets
- 2 handfuls sugar snap peas or snow peas

Put a small saucepan of salted water on to boil.

Crush chickpeas, garlic and lemon juice together in a bowl with a fork or your hands until you have a chunky mash. Stir through a couple of tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Taste and season.

Place a frying pan over a medium high heat. When the pan is hot and the water is boiling, pop the peas in the water. Add a few tablespoons oil to the frying pan, season lamb and cook for 2 minutes each side or until browned on the outside but still pink in the middle.

When the lamb is done, the peas should also be ready. Drain peas. Divide crushed chickpeas between 2 plates. Top with lamb and peas.

sweet treats

little ricotta tartlets with fig & honey

max

The secret to these little tartlets is to find a good biscuit (cookie) to use as the 'shell'. I've used Butternut Snap cookies which are a sweet oat-based biscuit similar to an ANZAC. Feel free to substitute with your favourite oat (oatmeal) cookie.

You could use any fruit you like. Fresh berries would be lovely as would roast stone fruit. Or even sliced mango and passionfruit. And it's not limited to just fruit toppings – praline, chopped nuts, even shaved chocolate. I need to make these tarts again, soon.

250g (1/2lb) ricotta
2 tablespoons sugar
8 Butternut Snap cookies or similar
2 large ripe figs, quartered lengthwise
honey

Preheat oven to 200C (400F).

Meanwhile, combine ricotta and sugar and stir until smooth.
Place cookies on a baking tray smooth side up and warm in the oven for approx 2 minutes, or until soft enough to bend.

While they are warm, carefully mould a soup spoon into the flat side of each cookie to form a little tartlet shell. Allow to cool for a minute.

Divide ricotta mixture between shells. Top each with a fig quarter and drizzle with honey.

raspberry gelato

serves 4

When it comes to fruit – raspberries are only just the beginning. It's pretty much up to your imagination. I'm toying with the idea of freezing some fresh figs if only I could stop eating them long enough to get them frozen. The only thing you'll need to do is adjust the amount of sugar to balance the natural sweetness of your chosen fruit. Raspberries are pretty tart so if you're using sweeter fruit I'd start with about the amount of sugar suggested below and add to taste.

The cream is really optional here. It adds a lovely creaminess but if you're after a fresher and more waistline friendly(!) option by all means leave it out but you might need to play around with the sugar levels.

300g (10oz) frozen raspberries
1/3 cup sugar (approx 70g or 2 1/2oz) or to taste
1/2 cup double cream (48% milk fat minimum)

Place all ingredients in a food processor and whizz until you have a smooth creamy mixture that looks like soft gelato.

Taste and add extra sugar if you think it needs it.

chocolate tim tam hedgehog

Tim Tams are THE best chocolate biscuits (cookies) in Australia, and possibly the world. If you can't get access to Tim Tams, substitute in your favourite chocolate biscuit or even something plain like a digestive.

100g (3 1/2oz) butter
100g (3 1/2oz) dark chocolate
1 packet Tim Tams (200g / 7oz)

Line a 24cm x 12 cm (approx 9 1/2in x 5in) loaf pan with baking paper or foil.

Place butter in a small saucepan over a medium heat until only just melted. If it starts to sizzle it will be too hot - so allow it to cool down before proceeding.

Break chocolate into small pieces and add to the butter. Allow to stand for a few minutes and then stir until chocolate is melted though. It may need another quick turn on the heat to get the chocolate to melt.

Cut Tim Tams into chunks about the size of a dice. Stir through chocolate mixture and scrape everything into the prepared tin.

Smooth the top and refrigerate until set - about 30 minutes or so.

[almost] instant malted vanilla icecream

serves 2

The [almost] disclaimer comes in because you need to freeze the banana first. But as long as you have that simple step complete, instant icecream is at your fingertips. I highly recommend making sure you have frozen bananas on hand at all times.

I have a thing for malted milk powder and love the creamy maltiness that it gives this super easy dessert. But you could easily give it a miss and use a litle icing (powedered) sugar to sweeten it instead.

Best if eaten within an hour or two of pureeing before the banana browns off.

- 2 bananas, peeled & frozen
- 3 tablespoons malted milk powder
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup pouring cream

Place all ingredients in a food processor and whizz until smooth and creamy.

Serve immediately.

super simple chocolate mousse

If you prefer to melt your chocolate in the microwave, by all means do so. I prefer this gentle method because it doesn't matter if I get side tracked and forget about my chocolate for a while.

100g (3oz) dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids), broken into small chunks
300mL (10 fl oz) whipping cream
1 tablespoon icing sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Place about 2cm (1in) boiling water in the base of a medium saucepan and bring to the boil. Remove from the heat. Place a heatproof bowl on the saucepan and check to make sure that the base isn't touching the water. Add the chocolate and leave for about 5 minutes to melt, stirring occasionally.

Meanwhile, whip cream with icing sugar and vanilla until soft and fluffy. You don't want it to be too firm.

Stir the chocolate and when it is all smooth add chocolate to the cream and fold through.

Divide between 4 small glasses or espresso cups and refrigerate until you're ready to serve.

machine-free honey icecream*

If you've always been a bit disappointed by icy semifreddo and other machine-free frozen desserts I feel your pain. But trust me – even after sitting in the freezer for 24hours this baby is creamy, smooth, soft and seriously good – not an icicle in sight.

Delicious as a desert on it's own, it would also be brilliant in all those places that icecream works so well – with hot chocolate pudding, apple crumble, bread and butter pudding. Yum. The only thing is that it is quite strongly honey flavoured which is great in most cases but could be a little overpowering as an accompaniment to something like a passionfruit souffle.

1/2 cup honey (180g or 6oz)
300mL (1 1/4 cups) double (heavy) cream
300mL (1 1/4 cups) pouring (single) cream
pistachios, to serve, optional

Place honey in a small saucepan and warm over a medium heat until really runny. Remove from the heat. Stir though double cream until smooth.

Whisk cream until it starts to thicken and form soft peaks. Fold whipped cream through the honey mixture and place in a freezer proof container. Freeze until you're ready to eat – give it at least 3 hours.

little baileys cheesecakes

serves 6

I made these for a dinner a few weeks ago and they were a BIG hit. I've used the oat based biscuits I used for my little fig and ricotta tartlets a few weeks ago but and plain sweet biscuit would work well here.

Make sure you use good quality firm ricotta from a deli, not the soft stuff sold in tubs. Otherwise you run the risk of sloppy cheesecakes.

6 butternut snap cookies or other plain sweet cookie
1/3 cup baileys
200g (7oz) ricotta
250g (9oz) philidelphia cream cheese
1/3 cup icing sugar (powdered sugar) (60g or 2oz)

Line a large muffin tin with 6 muffin papers.

Place cookies upside down in the base of each – you may need to trim them with a knife to get them to sit flat. Drizzle 1 teaspoon of baileys over each cookie.

Combine remaining baileys, ricotta, cream cheese and icing sugar and mash it all together with a fork until smooth. Alternatively, whizz in a food processor.

Divide ricotta mixture between muffin papers and refrigerate until you're ready to eat.

a chocolate tasting

the world's easiest dessert

We've all been there. You've invited some mates over for a mid week dinner. The plan was to slip away from work early. Home by five. Plenty of time to knock up three courses. Right? If only.

Rather than give up mid week entertaining, I've decided to be more realistic with my planning. One of the secret weapons I've developed is to host a chocolate tasting for dessert. I used to sample chocolate and biscuits (cookies) on a regular basis for a living. And had the inspiration that tastings could be fun to do with your friends.

1. Choose three different chocolates.

It's up to you what type of chocolate you offer for tasting. You could choose three different brands of say 70% cocoa solids chocolate and have a bit of a comparison. You'll be surprised just how different they will be.

Another option is to go for a white, milk and dark from the same producer so you can get everyone to explore which is their favourite type. Or you could try three different dark chocolates with different levels of cocoa solids. Or a cheap cooking chocolate, a mid range and a more expensive… the possibilities are endless really.

2. Plonk them in the middle of the table.

For an added level of complexity, you could serve them unlabelled or 'blind' as we professional tasters like to say. But this can make it a little intimidating for some people. Maybe save this for a follow up session

3. Explore, discuss and enjoy.

You can make it as in depth or as casual as you like. I like to keep it very conversational and fun. Just let everyone taste and talk about what they are experiencing – their likes and dislikes.

If your guests want to get a bit more serious about their chocolate appreciation, you could give them a few pointers as to what the professionals look for. I've pulled together a bit of a guide on stonesoup.

fresh dates with blue cheese

This is one of those really simple ideas where the whole far exceeds the sum of the parts....a flavour explosion. As with any simple recipe, it is really critical that you use the highest quality ingredients. So make sure you use the best fresh dates you can get your hands on. If all you have is supermarket pitted dates you would be better off to turn them into sticky date pudding and save this recipe for another day.

The dates are a great thing to serve at the end of a casual dinner when you want something simple to go with some warming Rutherglen Muscat or a luscious Botrytis Semillon (Sauterne).

6 - 8 dates
blue cheese, such as gorgonzola

Cut a slit down one side of each date and remove the seed. Fill the cavity with a chunk of blue cheese.

Serve at room temperature with a good grind of black pepper.

how to setup a minimalist kitchen – the essentials

Here are my minimalist kitchen essentials – what I'd invest in if I was kitting out a kitchen from scratch. This is just my personal list – based on the types of things I like to cook. Of course your essentials will be different depending on your cooking preferences and style.

A good quality cooks knife and a bread knife if you are a fan of slice-your-own. Forget those knife block sets.

One large wooden board for all purpose chopping and a plastic one that can go in the dishwasher for raw meat, poultry etc. If you're vego you could stick to just one board.

A dishwasher (unless you are some zen master dishwashing fan), an oven (preferably electric fan-forced), a stove top (preferably conduction or gas) and fridge with a freezer.

If you live by yourself – 1 smallish skillet will be fine but if you ever cook for a few people, a larger frying pan will come in handy. Best to get ones with ovenproof handles.

If I was being super minimalist I could limit my pots to just one – my 26cm cherry red enamel coated cast iron le creuset. It's perfect for everything from boiling pasta to slow cooking a batch of lamb shanks. I can't tell you how much I love it. But only having one saucepan can be very limiting if you want to boil some spuds for mash to go with your lamb shanks so I think it's reasonable to have another pot. I have a mini stock pot that it about the same size as the le creuset that is fine for pretty much anything.

You can also use your roasting pan to bake scones or cookies – saving you buying a separate cookie sheet.

I have a set of 'blates' which are lovely, shallow pasta bowls. They are the ultimate minimalist crockery because you can pretty much serve anything on them from a steak to pasta. You could also use them for soup or cereal if needed, I'd also include one mug or teacup per person which can double up as an alternative to little ramekins or serving cups for desserts.

Forget the free set of steak knives you really just need one fork, spoon and knife per person.

A wineglass and a tumbler per person is the minimum because I like to have both water and wine with my meals.

One large bowl that doubles as both is all you really need.

A whisk for egg whites or whipping cream, a can opener, a bottle opener (although non-drinkers would be able to get away without one), a spatula for getting food out of the frying pan (more versatile than tongs I find), a microplane grater for anything from chocolate to cheese. A large strainer for draining pasta that can also be used for sieving flour or removing lumps from sauces or custard.

A loaf pan is the bare minimum I could get by with. It can be used for loaves of bread, any type of cake or even making terrines.

how to setup a minimalist kitchen - the nice to haves

Part two of how to setup a minimalist kitchen details the items that aren't exactly critical but make life in the kitchen a lot easier.

While you could outsource your sharpening, I highly recommend investing in a set of Furi fingers – the most effective sharpening system I've ever used.

You can always boil water in a saucepan but a kettle is brilliant for cups of tea and boiling water for pasta etc when you're in a hurry.

You can live without one but they can make life a lot easier – and make purees possible. Also excellent for slicing or grating large amounts of vegetables.

I love having a big pot of stock simmering while I do other things on a lazy Sunday afternoon. If you're not a stock maker, you can easily live with a normal large saucepan.

If you're not into following recipes then you probably won't need these but they make life easier especially for the bakers amongst us.

Tongs can be useful especially for the BBQ when you don't want to puncture your meat. A vegetable peeler can make peeling a heap quicker and can take the place of a mandoline for cutting fine ribbons for vegetables. I'm a big fan of lemon zest. While you can use a microplane to do the job, I prefer the clean little strips you get from a lemon zester. Serving spoons are a civilized option for when you have guests, although not critical as you could always get people to use their own cutlery or even better their fingers.

I'm a fan of serving things in the middle of the table so everyone can help themselves but you could always serve straight from the frying pan or pot.

Unless you are lucky enough to have your own rain water tank, a water filter is an economical and environmentally friendly alternative to buying bottled water.

Years ago I would have included a salad spinner in the essentials, but these days there are so many prewashed leaves available you could get by without one.

For years I just stored everything in its original packaging with a rubber band or a peg to seal but there was always the odd moth infestation that kinda grossed me out so I invested in glass canisters.

You could pop foil over your plate or leave leftovers in the saucepan but this could be a pain when you want to cook something the next day. I have a few Pyrex dishes with plastic lids which I love for many reasons. They look good, they seal properly so you can be sure your lunch will make it to work, they are glass so you don't have to worry about plastic leeching into your food AND they are oven proof so you can pop them straight into the oven to reheat things.

I included the loaf pan in the critical list, but I do use my 24cm (9in) round cake tin with a removable base and my 28cm (11in) tart tin with removable base frequently.

As a Australian, I'm really tempted to include a barbie in the essentials but I have managed to live without one from time to time.

my minimalist pantry – the essentials

Again, this is just my personal list – based on the types of things I like to cook. Of course your essentials will be different depending on your cooking preferences and style. Actually I'd love to hear if there's anything you strongly disagree with or anything you feel it is a crime not to include.

I like to stock a cheaper extra virgin olive oil for general cooking, a more expensive peppery number for dressings and drizzling and some peanut oil for frying.

You could just keep one box of sea salt flakes but it's good to have cheaper grade of sea salt for making brines and salting pasta water.

I can't imagine a world without freshly ground black pepper.

Caster sugar is the most versatile as it is fine grained so will dissolve readily.

Of all the sauces, soy is the most versatile. I've been appreciating it as a vegetarian source of savoury flavours.

You never know when a chocolate-critical moment is going to arise. Also great as a backup dessert.

I love my tea and couldn't imagine life without it.

Perfect for emergency pasta sauce.

If I had to narrow down my canned legume collection to one essential, chickpeas would win hands down.

Also known as 'Puy' lentils, these are my favourite lentil. Small and pretty, they are very forgiving and don't turn to mush like many other lentils.

It's not called 'all purpose' flour for nothing. Can be used in baking, breadmaking and pasta.

Not essential for non-bakers, but my first choice for a leavening agent. Will turn plain flour into self raising flour in a flash – just add 2 teaspoons to a cup of plain flour.

My breakfast of choice.

Dried red chilli flakes are my first choice for a little fire.

For crunch in a crumble, or salad, or for a healthy snack, it's always a good to have some nuts on hand.

I tend to have at least one short pasta and a long pasta like linguine in the pantry. Worth spending the extra money on the artisanal stuff.

My two favourite rice.

As anyone with an Irish boyfriend knows, potatoes are an essential pantry item.

It keeps for ages and makes a world of difference to many dishes.

I have this thing that if I have lemons and parmesan (and loo paper) in the house then everything will be all right.

There are few things that can't be improved with a grating of fresh parmigiano reggiano. I also love it as a snack.

Critical for roast spuds, and easy to grow. It's one of my few surviving fresh herbs. Also keeps well in the freezer.

If you have eggs, you have a meal.

my minimalist pantry

the nice to haves

I love brown sugar for sprinkle on my porridge or for baking. Can be substituted for palm sugar in Asian cooking.

I have a massive vinegar collection which will be hard to part with, but I think I can do it if I keep a well-aged balsamic, a light white wine vinegar, and my Sarsons brown malt vinegar that I picked up in Ireland to splash over takeaway fish and chips.

A little goes a long way. I love a little drizzled over steamed greens and steamed whole fish.

After soy, these two are my go-to sauces for Asian cooking.

These are 'sentimental ingredients'. I like to have on hand in case I get a craving for my Mum's chocolate caramel slice.

Both are brilliant to brighten up your cooking. Anchovies also have the ability to enhance the meaty flavours in a stew.

Another little ray of salty sunshine that can make a world of difference to your food.

If chickpeas are the essential canned legume, it is nice to have some or all of the above on hand for almost instant salads or purees.

Also known as bakers flour or high protein flour, this is the best for baking bread, pizza crusts or home made egg pasta. Of course, non-bakers can skip this.

For adding texture to fresh pasta and giving pizza bases and bread a rustic crunchy base.

For beefing up the fiber content in my breakfast.

These are the three spices I rely on the most. Purists will argue that they should be whole seeds but minimalists will see the benefits of not needing another piece of equipment to grind their spices.

For making puddle cookies and best ever (cocoa) brownies. Definitely not essential but good to have on hand for baking or for a hot chocolate when someone has depleted your chocolate stash.

At the moment I have some dried sweetened cranberries that can be used in salads or baking.

Lovely with avocado on toast but I won't try and convert any non-Australians, just yet.

Sometimes, if I'm feeling a bit impoverished, I use vanilla extract or vanilla bean paste instead.

While pasta and rice are essentials, I do like to keep different grains on hand. Barley, freekah, couscous and quinoa are all in my pantry at the moment.

So many great things start with sauteeing an onion.

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about the author

The author of this ebook is Jules Clancy.

I'm a food scientist, writer, runner, photographer and aspiring minimalist. I live in Sydney and I hate having my photgraph taken.

In January 2010, I packed in my day job as a chocolate biscuit designer for Australia's largest biscuit company to become a full time blogger. I write stonesoup I minimalist home cooking (www.thestonesoup.com), a blog that helps people become better home cooks by using a minimalist approach to cooking.

After snagging a reservation, I was lucky enough to dine at elBulli - the best restaurant in the world. It was truly the most amazing food experience of my life and inspired me to start a blog to chronicle my eating adventures called breadshoes (www.breadshoes.com).

Last year, I self published my first cookbook, 'and the love is free - mum a life with recipes' to celebrate the beautiful life and cooking of my Mum who died from cancer in 2007. It is available to purchase through stonesoup.

When I'm not cooking, writing about food or taking photographs [of food], I can be found indulging my passions for long boozy lunches, travel, running, sweaty bikram yoga, cookbooks, boating on Sydney harbour, cheese and red shoes. [OK. all shoes].

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